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DPHHS FWP Fact Sheet Questions & Answers Hunters and Anthrax Common Sense Precautions When Handling Wild Game

A naturally occurring outbreak of anthrax in domestic bison and in wildlife has been occurring in portions of Gallatin and Madison counties since July. The area, located in the North portion of hunting district 311, encompasses the Cherry Creek, Spanish Creek, and Elk Creek drainages, from the Spanish Peaks north to U.S. Highway 84.

The risk of human infection with anthrax in the outdoors, and the risk of harvesting a wild animal with an anthrax infection, is very low.

To further minimize the risk of exposure to anthrax bacteria, hunters should follow the precautions described below. All hunters should follow these precautions to minimize their risks for an unlikely exposure to other diseases including leptospirosis, brucellosis, and chronic wasting disease (CWD), as well as anthrax.

Q: What is anthrax?

A: Anthrax is caused by bacteria. The bacteria can lie dormant in the ground for decades, then become active under ideal soil and weather conditions. Naturally occurring outbreaks of anthrax in grazing animals are not uncommon during late summer. This outbreak involves multiple species.

Q: Which animals have been infected during the current naturally occurring outbreak?

A: During the current naturally occurring outbreak, the most affected animals have been domestic bison. Some deer and elk and one bovine bull have also died of anthrax. Anthrax is suspected in the death of a black bear.

Q: What is the risk for hunters?

A: The risk of a hunter being infected with anthrax is very low. Taking common sense precautions while hunting can minimize the risk.

Q: What precautions should be taken?

A: Hunters should be aware that not all wildlife will show obvious signs of being sick during the pursuit, field dressing, skinning or butchering process. The following common sense precautions will minimize the risk of being exposed to anthrax bacteria:

- If hunters encounter dead elk, deer, bison, or livestock with no obvious cause of death: do not handle the animal, do not approach the animal, note the location and report it to the nearest FWP office.
- Do not harvest animals that appear ill or are acting abnormally.
- When field dressing and butchering a harvested animal, follow the procedures recommended by DPHHS and FWP for all big game and birds.

Q: What procedures are recommended by DPHHS and FWP for field dressing and processing harvested animals?

A: DPHHS & FWP recommends:

- Wear latex or rubber gloves when field dressing deer, elk, or other wild animals.
- Minimize contact with animal fluids, brain and spinal tissues.
- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing and processing.
- Cook all meat until well done before consuming.

For more information on anthrax, visit the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services at dphhs.mt.gov. Click "Precautions for Hunters," listed under "Featured Topics." Or call 406-444-0273